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Tornado outbreak of February 12, 1945

On February 12, 1945, a devastating tornado outbreak occurred across the Southeastern United States, which killed 45 people and injured 427 others.<sup>[1][2]</sup> This outbreak included a devastating tornado that struck Montgomery, Alabama, which killed 26 people.<sup>[2]</sup> The United States Weather Bureau described this tornado as "the most officially observed one in history" as it reached within 0.5 miles (0.80 km) from the U.S. Weather Bureau's office.<sup>[2]</sup> Tornado expert Thomas P. Grazulis estimated the intensity of the Montgomery tornado to be F3 on the Fujita scale.<sup>[1]</sup> Earlier that day, another tornado – also estimated to be F3 intensity – struck Meridian, Mississippi, killing 5–7 people.<sup>[1][3]</sup> Between the Meridian tornado and the Montgomery tornado, the strongest tornado of the day struck near York, Alabama and Livingston, Alabama, killing 11 people. Grazulis estimated the intensity of the tornado to be F4 on the Fujita scale.<sup>[1]</sup>

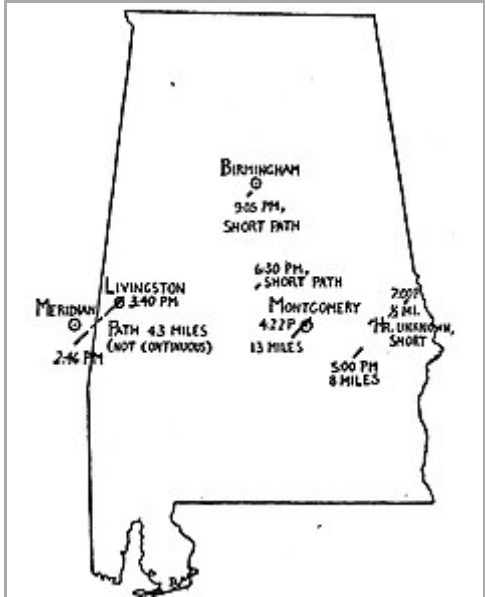
Confirmed tornadoes

All ratings on the Fujita scale were made by Thomas P. Grazulis, a tornado expert, and are classified as unofficial ratings since official ratings for tornadoes began in 1950.<sup>[4]</sup> Grazulis only documented tornadoes he considered to be significant (F2+), so the true number of tornadoes for this outbreak is most likely higher. That said, the National Weather Service (NWS) office in Birmingham, Alabama, published a list of tornadoes, which occurred in Alabama, during 1945.<sup>[5]</sup> In this list, NWS Birmingham assigned ratings from the Fujita scale to the tornadoes, creating some level of an official/unofficial rating for these tornadoes.<sup>[5]</sup>

Confirmed tornadoes by Fujita rating

FU	F0	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	Total
≥ 0	≥ 0	≥ 0	3	4	1	0	≥8

Tornado outbreak of February 12, 1945



A map of the tornado outbreak on February 12, 1945 by F. C. Pate.

Meteorological history

Duration	February 12, 1945
Tornado outbreak	
Tornadoes	≥8
Maximum rating	F4 tornado
Overall effects	
Casualties	45 fatalities, 427 injuries
Damage	\$1.972 million (1945 USD) <sup>[1]</sup>
Areas affected	Southeastern United States
Part of the <u>tornado outbreaks of 1945</u>	

## February 12 event

Confirmed tornadoes during February 12, 1945<sup>[nb 1]</sup>

F#	Location	County / Parish	State	Time (local)	Path length	Max width	
F3		Jones to Vimville	Lauderdale	MS	15:35	9 mi (14 km)	400 yd (370 m)
<p>7 deaths – The tornado started in the community of Jones, 7 miles (11 km) south of Meridian, and moved northeastward. Multiple homes in rural communities were completely swept away, with four deaths occurring in three of these homes. A fifth person was killed in an open field as they were running for shelter. In total, five people were killed and 40 others were injured.<sup>[1][5]</sup> This was one of three tornadoes marked by Grazulis that the United States Weather Bureau originally marked as a single tornado. The U.S. Weather Bureau documented that this long-track tornado killed 40 people and injured 200 others.<sup>[6]</sup> Modern research by Thomas P. Grazulis as well as later publications from the U.S. Weather Bureau indicate that there were actually three separate tornadoes.<sup>[1][2]</sup> Two more deaths and a total of 50 injuries were reported by the Associated Press, which is cited by the National Weather Service office in Birmingham, Alabama.<sup>[3]</sup> This brings the total number of deaths to seven and the total number of injuries to 50 for this tornado.<sup>[5]</sup></p>							
F4	Near York to near Livingston	Sumter	AL	16:30	18 mi (29 km)	400 yd (370 m)	
<p>11 deaths – A home was leveled on the southeastern edge of York, where a couple was killed. In Livingston, five people were killed in a single home. Two other homes were damaged or destroyed, and a person was killed in each. The tornado struck a train crossing the Sucarnoochee River, where it derailed 39 cars. The conductor of the train was killed, along with a fireman, and many others were injured. In total, the tornado killed 11 people, injured 63 others, and caused \$220,000 (1945 USD) in damage.<sup>[1][5]</sup> This is one of three tornadoes marked by Grazulis that the United States Weather Bureau originally marked as a single tornado. The U.S. Weather Bureau documented that this long-track tornado killed 40 people and injured 200 others.<sup>[6]</sup> Modern research by Thomas P. Grazulis as well as later publications from the U.S. Weather Bureau indicate that there were actually three separate tornadoes.<sup>[1][2]</sup></p>							
F3	SW of Montgomery to Chisholm	Montgomery	AL	17:22	13 mi (21 km)	350 yd (320 m)	
<p>26 deaths – <i>See section on this tornado</i> – 293 people were injured.<sup>[1][7]</sup></p>							
F2	W of Union Springs to Thompson	Bullock	AL	18:00	8 mi (13 km)	100 yd (91 m)	
<p>Four homes were destroyed in Thompson and four others were damaged. Nine people were injured.<sup>[1][5]</sup></p>							
F3	E of Tuskegee	Macon	AL	18:30	0.5 mi (0.80 km)	120 yd (110 m)	
<p>This brief intense tornado struck a cluster of five small homes, destroying all of them and leaving two people injured.<sup>[1][5]</sup></p>							
F2	S of Opelika	Lee	AL	19:30	0.5 mi (0.80 km)	125 yd (114 m)	
<p>The tornado destroyed two barns and four other buildings, and injured one person.<sup>[1][5]</sup></p>							
F3	SE of Stanton	Chilton	AL	19:45	1 mi (1.6 km)	100 yd (91 m)	
<p>1 death – A large house and a barn were destroyed southeast of Stanton. One person was killed and eight others were injured.<sup>[1][5]</sup></p>							
F2	Shades Mountain	Jefferson	AL	22:05	0.5 mi (0.80 km)	120 yd (110 m)	

Seven buildings were destroyed, six were damaged, and one person was injured. A roof from one of the buildings was carried over 1 mile (1.6 km).<sup>[1][5]</sup>

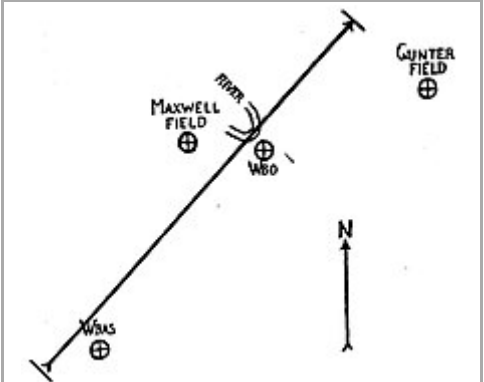
## Montgomery–Chisholm, Alabama

The tornado started 5 miles (8.0 km) southwest of Montgomery, Alabama and moved northeast, towards Montgomery where it would brush the western edge. The tornado leveled two government or U.S. army warehouses.<sup>[3]</sup> A freight train was also struck, where 50 cars "were ripped and tossed about like match boxes".<sup>[3]</sup> Maxwell Air Force Base was plunged into hours of darkness from a blackout caused by the tornado, which passed extremely close to the base.<sup>[3]</sup> After hitting Montgomery, the tornado struck Chisholm, Alabama, where it caused catastrophic damage. Thirty homes were completely swept away in Chisholm. All the fatalities from this tornado occurred in 15 homes within a 20-block radius. Over 100 homes were completely destroyed by the tornado. In total, the tornado killed 26 people, injured 293 others, and caused \$1.7 million (1945 USD) in damage along its 13 miles (21 km) path.<sup>[1][2][5][8][9]</sup> Tornado expert Thomas P. Grazulis indicated the maximum width of this tornado was 100 yards (91 m).<sup>[1]</sup> The United States Weather Bureau stated the tornado contained a uniform width of 100 yards (0.091 km) except near Union Station, where it momentarily grew to its peak width of 350 yards (320 m).<sup>[2]</sup> This is one of three tornadoes marked by Grazulis that the United States Weather Bureau originally marked as a single tornado. The U.S. Weather Bureau documented that this long-track tornado killed 40 people and injured 200 others.<sup>[6]</sup> Modern research by Grazulis as well as a later publication from the U.S. Weather Bureau indicate that there were actually three separate tornadoes.<sup>[1][2][8]</sup> The Tornado Project, headed by Grazulis, would later list this tornado as one of the "worst tornadoes" in the history of Alabama.<sup>[10]</sup>

The entire city of Montgomery lost power for several hours following the tornado. Chauncey Sparks, then governor of Alabama, ordered three companies from the Alabama National Guard to the state capital to prevent looting.<sup>[3]</sup> As news of the tornado's impact on Montgomery and Chisholm spread, curiosity set in as residents attempted to travel to the affected areas "by the thousands", causing traffic congestion and blocking the roads.<sup>[3]</sup> Military police from Maxwell Air Force Base and Gunter Field along with local law enforcement eventually cleared the streets from onlookers.<sup>[3]</sup> Cadets from both military bases were sent to clear away the debris while organizations like the Red Cross and Salvation Army cared for those who were injured or left homeless by the tornado.<sup>[3]</sup>

F. C. Pate, a forecaster at the United States Weather Bureau office in Montgomery, Alabama, undertook an extensive assessment on this tornado between 1945–1946.<sup>[2]</sup> During this assessment, Pate would call this tornado "the most officially observed one in history" as it passed 2 miles (3.2 km) away from four different government weather stations, including the U.S. Weather Bureau office in Montgomery.<sup>[2]</sup> U.S. Weather Bureau meteorologist E. D. Emigh stated that he watched the tornado from his downtown observatory.<sup>[11]</sup> The forward speed of the tornado was determined to have been 49 miles per hour (79 km/h) by the Maxwell Field radar, which was one of the government weather stations that was passed by the tornado.<sup>[2]</sup>

## Montgomery–Chisholm, Alabama



A map of the Montgomery, Alabama tornado by F. C. Pate, who worked for the U.S. Weather Bureau office in Montgomery, Alabama.

Meteorological history	
Formed	February 12, 1945, 4:22 p.m. <u>CST</u>
F3 tornado	
on the <u>Fujita scale</u>	
Overall effects	
Fatalities	26
Injuries	293
Damage	\$1.7 million (1945 USD)

The radar also determined the height of the tornado to 4,000 feet (1,200 m).<sup>[2]</sup> The storm which produced the tornado was dry, with no documentable precipitation.<sup>[2]</sup> It was noted that as the tornado dissipated, a rain shaft formed in place of the tornado, which dropped 0.3 inches (0.76 cm) of rain.<sup>[2]</sup>

## See also

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- Tornado outbreak of April 12, 1945

## Notes

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1. All dates are based on the local time zone where the tornado touched down; however, all times are in Coordinated Universal Time for consistency.

## References

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